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TEXT
TAGS: ELAB, PGOV, PINR, BL
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: LEGENDARY JUAN LECHIN: STILL SMOKING

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY

2. LABATT MET RECENTLY WITH JUAN LECHIN, THE LEGENDARY
LEADER OF THE COMMUNIST-ORIENTED BOLIVIAN LABOR
FEDERATION ("COB"). LECHIN IS FEISTY, BUT THERE IS MORE
SMOKE THAN FIRE IN HIS DISCOURSE. A SUMMARY OF THE

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
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WORLD ACCORDING TO LECHIN FOLLOWS:

-- UCS PARTY LEADER MAX FERNANDEZ COULD BECOME PRESIDENT OF BOLIVIA, BUT HE IS HURTING HIS CHANCES BY FEUDING WITH RIVAL POPULIST PARTY CONDEPA;

-- THE COB IS FAILING TO REACH THE NEW LABOR CONSTITUENCIES IN BOLIVIA, INCLUDING RURAL FARM LABORERS AND THE SALARIED MIDDLE CLASS;

-- THE ADDITION OF FORMER GUERRILLA AND MINISTER OF LABOR OSCAR ZAMORA AS VICE-PRESIDENT ON THE ADN'S HUGO BANZER TICKET WILL YIELD BANZER "AT LEAST" 30,000 ADDITIONAL VOTES;

-- AS TO USG POLICIES, LECHIN IS OPPOSED "TO ALL OF THEM." SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE. END SUMMARY.

A WHIFF OF THE OLD BOLIVIA

3. LABOR ATTACHE MET NOVEMBER 19 WITH JUAN LECHIN, THE LEGENDARY LEADER OF THE COB FROM ITS GLORY YEARS OF THE FIFTIES UNTIL THE MID-EIGHTIES. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE IN THE CAFE DE LA CLUB DE LA PAZ, HANGOUT FOR MANY OF THE FORMER AND SOME OF THE CURRENT LUMINARIES OF LA PAZ, AND UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO THE FAVORITE HAUNT OF **KLAUS BARBIE**, THE NAZI BUTCHER OF LYON AND SOMETIME ADVISER TO BOLIVIAN MILITARY DICTATORS. AS WE WERE CHATTING, THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR CAME OVER TO EMBRACE LECHIN, AND A NOTED BOLIVIAN HISTORIAN TAPPED LECHIN ON THE SHOULDER TO INVITE HIM TO JOIN HIS TABLE LATER.

4. THE ENCOUNTER WAS ARRANGED BY A PROSPEROUS BOLIVIAN BUSINESSMAN WHO IS CLOSE FRIENDS WITH LECHIN AND WHO TOLD LABATT HE MET THE FAMOUS LABOR LEADER WHEN THE BUSINESSMAN WAS A YOUNG MILITARY OFFICER ON THE INSIDE OF A "PROGRESSIVE" (AND ULTIMATELY SUCCESSFUL) MILITARY COUP. THE OFFICER'S ERRAND WAS TO OBTAIN THE ENDORSEMENT OF LECHIN FOR THE COUP. LECHIN SAID HE WAS SYMPATHETIC, BUT COULD ONLY WORK BEHIND THE SCENES, BECAUSE HIS CONSTITUENCY "WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND."

LECHIN DID IN CHE GUEVARA?

5. AS HIS FRIEND TELLS IT, LECHIN PULLED STRINGS EVEN OUTSIDE OF BOLIVIA. WHEN CHE GUEVARA ARRIVED IN BOLIVIA IN THE MID-SIXTIES, LECHIN SAW HIM AS A THREAT AND WAS OPPOSED TO HIS INTERVENTION. ACCORDING TO THE FRIEND, LECHIN FLEW TO CUBA, MET WITH CASTRO, AND PERSUADED CASTRO TO CUT CHE'S LIFELINES, ALLOWING THE BOLIVIANS AND THEIR ALLIES TO CAPTURE (AND KILL) HIM.

LECHIN TODAY

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6. JUAN LECHIN IS ABOUT SEVENTY-FIVE AND LOOKS LIKE A SILVER-HAIRED SPANISH ARISTOCRAT. HE IS STILL HANDSOME, AND NOT-SO-DOWAGER SOCIAL LEADING LADIES STILL FLOCK AROUND HIM. HE IS REPUTED TO BE, AND APPEARS RICH. BUT HE NO LONGER COUNTS FOR MUCH WITHIN THE COB, HAVING LOST OUT IN THE DEBACLE OF THE MID-EIGHTIES. NOR DOES HE HAVE MUCH OF A ROLE IN THE LARGER POLITICAL ARENA. EVEN MANY OF HIS ERSTWHILE ENEMIES HAVE MADE PEACE WITH HIM, BECAUSE OF HIS VALUE TO THE COUNTRY AS AN HISTORICAL ARTIFACT.

CURRENT BOLIVIAN POLITICS

7. ALTHOUGH LECHIN IS NO LONGER A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL PLAYER, HE REMAINS, IN HIS LUCID MOMENTS, A SHREWD ANALYST. HE BELIEVES THAT THE ADDITION OF LEFT-WING (FRI) VP CANDIDATE OSCAR ZAMORA, THE FORMER MINISTER OF LABOR, TO THE BANZER TICKET WILL BRING BANZER AT LEAST 30,000 VOTES (SEPTTEL). MANY PUNDITS OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT ARE DENOUNCING THE STRANGE ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE FORMER GUERRILLA ZAMORA AND THE FORMER MILITARY DICTATOR, BUT TO THE PRACTICED BOLIVIAN POLITICAL EYE OF LECHIN, IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE.

8. LECHIN HAS A MORE DISPASSIONATE RESPONSE TO THE MAX FERNANDEZ PHENOMENON THAN MOST ESTABLISHMENT POLITICIANS. HE IS WILLING TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT MAX MIGHT BE PRESIDENT WITHOUT BELIEVING THAT EVENT WOULD HERALD THE BEGINNING OF THE APOCALYPSE. MAX, ACCORDING TO LECHIN, WILL WIN MOST OF THE VOTES IN THE RURAL AREAS WHERE HE HAS BUILT BUILDINGS, PROVIDED MEDICAL CARE, OR DONE OTHER GOOD WORKS FOR THE COMMUNITY. "THOSE PEOPLE," ACCORDING TO LECHIN, "DO NOT KNOW HOW TO READ, THEY HAVE NO CONTACT WITH NATIONAL POLITICS. IT MEANS NOTHING TO THEM. IF MAX HAS DONE SOMETHING FOR THEM, HOWEVER, HE MEANS SOMETHING TO THEM. THEY WILL VOTE FOR HIM." LECHIN BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT THE MAX FERNANDEZ-CONDEPA BATTLE ABOUT CONDEPA ALLEGATIONS OF A MAX CONNECTION TO NARCO-TRAFFICKERS HAS DAMAGED BOTH SIDES. THE TWO PARTIES ARE FIGHTING FOR THE SAME VOTES, AND DISGUSTING THE ELECTORS WITH THE VICIOUSNESS OF THE ALLEGATIONS AND RESULTING LAWSUITS.

LECHIN ON THE CURRENT LABOR SCENE

9. LECHIN WAS CRITICAL OF THE COB, SAYING THEY HAVE FAILED TO KEEP PACE WITH THE CHANGES OF BOLIVIAN SOCIETY. "THEY SHOULD BE DOING MORE WITH THE COOPERATIVES, MORE WITH THE RURAL AGRICULTURAL LABORERS ('CAMPESESINOS') HE SAID. "THE NUMBER OF FACTORY WORKERS, MINERS, THE TRADITIONAL LABOR SECTORS, IS DECLINING," LECHIN ADDED.

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10. LECHIN WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT "NEO-LIBERAL" MODEL THAT HAS BEEN ADOPTED BY THE GOB. "THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING ARE THOSE ON MORE-OR-LESS FIXED INCOMES, NOT ONLY FACTORY WORKERS, BUT THE SALARIED MIDDLE CLASS, THOSE WHO PAY MOST OF THE TAXES OF BOLIVIA. THEIR PURCHASING POWER IS CONSTANTLY ERODED BY INFLATION, BUT NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT -- NOR THE COB -- DOES ANYTHING FOR THEM." LECHIN BELIEVES THE COB SHOULD EXPAND ITS CLIENTELE TOWARD BOTH THE CAMPESINOS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS.

LECHIN ON AMERICAN POLICY

11. ASKED TO COMMENT ON ASPECTS OF AMERICAN POLICY, LECHIN DEMURRED, SAYING THE TOPIC WOULD TAKE TOO MUCH TIME, AND WOULD HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE NEXT ENCOUNTER. HE SAID HE COULD SUMMARIZE HIS POINT OF VIEW, HOWEVER. HE IS OPPOSED. TO ALL OF IT.

BOWERS

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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